

VZCZCXRO8165

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHROV #0043 0831320
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 241320Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1077
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 0016
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0024
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0006
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0048
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0056
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 1113

UNCLAS VATICAN 000043

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ID](#) [JA](#) [IN](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN SEEKS GREATER DIALOGUE WITH ASIAN FAITHS

REF: A. A) 08 VATICAN 87

[1](#)B. B) VATICAN 5

[1](#)1. (SBU) Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, told Charge d'Affaires on March 17 that he plans to increase his engagement with Hindus, Buddhists and Shintoists this year. He said the Vatican has focused considerably on dialogue with Islam in recent years (ref a), and needs more balance in its inter-faith work. (Note: For complex organizational reasons, Catholic relations with Jews are handled by a different Council, under Cardinal Kasper. Tauran does not play a role in that dialogue. End Note.) In pursuit of the expanded dialogue with Asian faiths, Tauran will travel to India in June, Japan in August, and Indonesia in November.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Additionally, Tauran will travel to Boston in April (for a short visit and to deliver a lecture), and to Washington D.C. in September. In Washington, he will participate in a roundtable discussion on religious freedom with former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami at the National Cathedral. Tauran would welcome meetings at the Department around the dates of the roundtable (post will follow up once dates are confirmed).

[1](#)3. (SBU) Tauran commented that his goal in talks this year was to go beyond the expressions of goodwill that had characterized his previous meetings with Asian religious leaders, particularly Hindus. He was concerned that there was a gap between the goodwill of his interlocutors and the hostility toward Christians in India -- especially among some Hindu nationalists. These nationalists fear that Christianity will expand among India's lower classes, thus putting at risk the traditional social castes there, and motivating the poor to demand social and economic justice. (Note: Previously, Vatican officials have shared with us concerns about anti-conversion laws, and about violence against Christians in Orissa. See ref b. End note.) Turning to his expected meeting later in the year in Japan, Tauran also expressed frustration that Asian cultures prefer to avoid confronting differences. This allows disagreements to linger unresolved, sometimes to the detriment of Christians. Tauran said he would try to find ways to address these concerns in a way that his hosts could find acceptable.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: While Cardinal Tauran understands the importance of dialogue with Islam -- which he will be promoting when he travels to Indonesia -- he has stated publicly on several occasions that the Vatican has not paid sufficient attention to relations with other religions in Asia. Tauran is not an expert on Asian religions and is unlikely to find -- or even seek -- common theological ground with their precepts. Most likely, he will use his meetings to challenge his interlocutors about obstacles to the enjoyment of religious freedom for all. End comment.

